

The Vine at Home

Seventh Sunday of Easter – Year A

Hymn: StF 28 – Jesus calls us here to meet him

Jesus calls us here to meet him, as through word and song and prayer,
We affirm God's promised presence, where his people live and care.
Praise the God who keeps his promise; Praise the son who calls us friends;
Praise the Spirit who, among us, to our hopes and fears attends.

Jesus calls us to confess him, word of life and Lord of all,
Sharer of our flesh and frailness, saving all who fail or fall.
Tells his holy human story; Tell his tales that all may hear;
Tell the world that Christ in glory came to earth to meet us here.

Jesus calls us to Each other vastly different though we are;
Creed and colour, class and gender neither limit nor debar.
Join the hand of friend and stranger; Join the hands of age and youth;
Join the faithful and the doubter In their common search for truth.

Jesus calls us to his table rooted firm in time and space,
Where the church in earth and heave finds a common meeting place.
Share the bread and wine, his body; Share the love of which we sing;
Share the feast for saints and sinners hosted by our Lord and King.

Words and music: John L Bell and Graham Mule.

Prayers

Living God, I want to follow you. Gracious God, I want to be a better disciple of you, and learn more about your call on my life.

Loving God, I want to love you more and show your love to this world.

This day, show me how I can be a part of your Kingdom.

This day, move me by your Spirit.

Amen.¹

We say the Lord's Prayer

Readings: Micah 6:6-8

What God Requires

⁶ "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

⁷ Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

⁸ He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

¹ Prayers written by Tim Baker

Acts 2:42-47

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

43 Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. **44** All who believed were together and had all things in common; **45** they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds^[a] to all, as any had need. **46** Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home^[b] and ate their food with glad and generous^[c] hearts, **47** praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Read through the Methodist Way of Life (see separate sheet)

Reflections on the readings

Over time, systems often get more complicated. Additional layers are added and bureaucracy increases, often becoming more anonymous. In the early days of automated billing, and before online banking, people would get reminders if they had not paid their bill saying something like 'please pay £20.60'. When a cheque was received for £20.60p the automated reminders stopped. If a cheque was not received, there would be more reminders, each slightly more fierce than the previous one, ending with a letter saying 'if you do not pay your bill for £20.60p your supply will be cut off'. One person received a bill for no pounds and no pence. He ignored the letter because there was nothing to pay. However, he got a reminder saying he had an outstanding bill of no pounds and pence. Eventually he had a final notice saying that if he did not pay his bill for no pounds and no pence, his power supply would be cut off. It was only solved by him sending a cheque for no pounds and no pence! That's what the system needed!

Religion is not immune to this problem. The text from Micah, and other passages in the Bible, suggests that that people can easily get caught up in the activities, ceremonies and rituals of religion and lose sight of what is at the heart of the faith. The prophet cuts through this, as he states in three simple phrases what God requires:

to act justly; to show mercy; and to walk humbly with God.

This, Micah declares, is more vital than animal sacrifices; more important than the money you give, more significant than even costly personal sacrifices. The heart of the faith is to do with justice, love and humility. If you live in this way, you are walking with God.

Micah makes faith simple and memorable.

Anyone can learn to recite this threefold summary, and it passes the Einstein test. Albert Einstein apparently said 'If you can't explain it to a six year old, you don't understand it yourself.'

A six year old can understand this way of living.

For Christians, it is important, sometimes, to go back to the core of our faith and remind ourselves what faith in everyday actions looks like. The passage from Acts 2 provides a picture. It sets out how the first Christians lived out what they believed. They attended to the Apostles teaching, shared regularly in holy communion and prayed; they made sure that

those in need were supported materially; they went to worship in the temple, they met in each other's' houses, ate food together and nurtured glad and generous hearts. They praised God and won the good will of the people.

All this, it seems, encouraged others to join the church. In other words, the way they lived carried the message of God's saving love and people were attracted.

A Methodist Way of Life sets out what it means to be a Methodist. It puts into words how we try to live our lives in response to God's love made known to us in Jesus.

It is a way of living that is simple and practical, based on the pattern of those early disciples. It is drawn from Our Calling – the statement the Methodist Church made in the year 2000 expressing what it believed God wanted of Methodism in the 21st century and locates it in every believer's daily life.

Like Micah's threefold rule, it points to the essentials of being a Christian. It is:

A reminder – pointing to key Christian practices and asking us to attend to those we find hard, as well as those that come easily.

A compass – providing a sense of direction for our Christian growth and action in the world.

A mirror – asking us to look at ourselves and pose questions about how we are responding to the love of God in Jesus. There are accompanying question for personal reflection, or better still, for a conversation with a Christian friend or group. The questions are to help us be honest and support one another on the journey.

(Pause)

Read the commitments aloud from The Methodist Way of Life.

Over the next few days, look at the questions and identify someone you could discuss these questions with.²

Roger Walton would like to encourage you to look at the commitments though out the coming days and weeks. To read them aloud. To share them aloud with others if possible. To make it your prayerful commitment for Christian living.

Prayers of intercession

Our heavenly Father, as we bring to you our prayers, we remember that on this day, your son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, returned to the heavenly glory that you prepared for him in love, as he prayed that we, his followers, will one day join him in your presence, to share in this glory and majesty. Lord of resurrection and ascension to you we bring our prayers.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers.

We pray for all of your people throughout the world. Those who work hard to build a better and cleaner society Lord, strengthen them. Those who are at the forefront of the fight against poverty, injustice and exploitation Lord, grant them strength and wisdom.

² Reflection written by Roger Walton

For our leaders, we pray that you will work amongst them so they will uphold the peace and prosperity of the world. Grant them Lord the courage to deal with the difficult issues we face at this time.

Lord of resurrection and ascension to you we bring our prayers. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Ascending God, for our needs and others, we look to you for support. Comfort us in times of need, reassure us in times of fear and in times of challenge, inspire us to look to you.

Our unspoken need we bring to you now in silence. *[Pause]*

Lord of resurrection and ascension to you we bring our prayers. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers. Amen.³

Hymn: 547 STF – Beyond these walls of worship

Beyond these walls of worship, In the stress and joy of life,
Can we offer you our bodies as a living sacrifice?

Will we keep you at the centre, far beyond the Sunday call?
Will we turn to you, be transformed by you; Still declare you God of all?

Beyond these walls of worship, in the times of work and rest,
Will we display your love for all when our faith's put to the test.

When the people that surround us deny that you are there?
Will we display our faith in you - in life, in praise, in prayer?

Beyond these walls of worship may your Spirit strengthen us
To make the whole of life our worship as we witness to your love.

From this moment in your presence, send us out now to proclaim
That we'll live our life as a sacrifice, to the glory of your name.

From this moment in your presence send us out now to proclaim
That we'll live our life as a sacrifice, to the glory of your name.

Words and music: Ian Worsfold and Paul Wood

Blessing

God of all grace,
Fill me with your love as I seek to follow you and support others as we build communities of togetherness, amongst so much isolation. May I be a part of your Kingdom here on earth,

Amen.⁴

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³ Adapted from prayers of intercession written by Lansford Penn-Timothy

⁴ Prayers by Tim Baker